



REMARKS BY ANDRE WELTMAN, CHAIR
FRIENDS OF PINE GROVE FURNACE STATE PARK

As a leader of one of the more than 40 Friends groups in Pennsylvania helping to keep our state parks and forests the best they can be, I see firsthand the extraordinary amount of time and attention that DCNR staff give to the construction and upkeep of these public resources.

Engineers, geologists, wastewater treatment plant operators, landscape architects, rangers, foresters, park managers, maintenance crews and so many others work together to keep the lights on, the potable water flowing, and the trash collected.

To do all that, we need to keep as many of those employees as possible working full time with competitive wages -- seasonal jobs are less attractive leading to larger staff turn-over and difficulties filling vacancies.

Visitors to our parks and forests might not realize the extent of the work required by volunteers and by employees to keep facilities and trails safe, efficient and attractive.

At my park, Pine Grove Furnace, we have excellent staff but simply not enough of them. We need an adequate number of park rangers and maintenance workers to keep up with public demand. Last **year's rainy summer created even more work for the limited number of employees. Also, Pine Grove Furnace** has historical buildings and structures that are especially difficult and expensive to maintain.

Between 1995 and 2016, DCNR spent roughly \$400 million to improve state park infrastructure, yet like owning a home, the to-do list never seems to get shorter. Acts of nature such as heavy precipitation and subsequent flooding, changes in safety standards, increased visitor demands, and general wear-and-tear all add to the work needed in our parks and forests.

Without adequate funding to keep facilities at their best, will fewer people visit our parks, meaning less money to the local economy? After all, the more than 40 million annual visitors to Pennsylvania state parks and forests generate more than \$1 billion a year for our economy by purchasing campsites and hotel rooms, meals, souvenirs and many other items. Will a greater strain be placed on volunteers like myself to make up for what park staff is unable to do given their limited resources?

And, will public safety be put at risk? Protection of the public is paramount in the day-to-day operation of our parks and forests, but without adequate funding, can that be guaranteed? For example, DCNR operates 131 dams, including 47 high-hazard dams that according to FEMA would pose a particular danger to human life and would cause significant property damage in the event of dam failure.

In fact, DCNR owns and operates more high-hazard dams than any other single public or private dam owner in PA. Today, most of these dams are more than 50 years old, requiring significant and costly repairs and upgrades to ensure public safety.

Finally, let's not forget critical maintenance for what sits behind all those dams: the reservoirs, lakes and beaches that are so popular and important to both people and wildlife. For example, some of those bodies of water -- including Laurel Lake at my park -- need dredging every few decades, an easy-to-overlook but expensive infrastructure need.